EARLY STAGES OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN NORTHERN INDIA

By D. D. Kosambi

*Reprinted from the Journal of the Bombay Branch,
Royal Asiatic Society, N.S., Vol. 22, 1946.*

Presented from -
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Prakrit Bharati Academy.

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1. It is not my intention to describe here the Indian caste system as it exists today, for the reader has access to all the documents [1] from which such a treatment would have to be condensed. Modern caste combines loosely several features of tribal and guild organization incorporated into theoretically rigid endogamic groups. This contemporary division into an almost innumerable set of castes does not, however, agree with the oldest theoretical division into just four: the priest *Brāhmaṇa*, the warrior-ruler *Kṣatriya*, the trader-householder *Vaiśya*, and the worker *Śūdra*. An attempt [2] has been made to identify the older *varṇa* (colour) division with classes and the modern but coexistent *jāti* scheme with tribal units. But this suffers from omission of the craftsmen's guilds, and from a static conception of caste—which is not surprising as caste in itself is an attempt at the negation of history. On the other hand, it has been denied categorically that the older four-caste system ever existed [3] at any time or place though so many Indian sources of unquestionable age and authenticity refer to it as a well-known contemporary institution.

One book on caste and race in India [4] states: "Whatever might have been the Buddha's own views and practice, it is indubitable that his immediate followers believed in the time-honoured institutions of caste, and being most probably Kṣatriyas themselves, utilized the opportunity offered by Buddha's revolt, to establish Kṣatriya pre-eminence among the four castes. The complete discomfiture of the Kṣatriyas within the Brāhmaṇic fold had made this course inevitable. Measuring their strength with the Brahmins and failing in the contest, they naturally turned their attention to the masses."

The statements in this extract, when they convey any meaning at all, are demonstrably wrong. Buddha's views are quite well-attested by the earliest texts of the Pali canon, which the author ignores entirely. Buddha's "revolt" was against Brāhmaṇic sacrifices, not against the caste system nor for Kṣatriya pre-eminence which was traditional and acknowledged except in the functions of a priest. As the Brāhmaṇic fold, strictly speaking, contains only Brāhmaṇas, "the complete discomfiture of the Kṣatriyas within" it is meaningless. Buddha's immediate followers are all known by name [5] and origin so that they cannot be made over into Kṣatriyas even by invoking the theory of probabilities. For example, Koṇḍañña and the other four who were the first converts were all Brāhmaṇas, as also the two principal apostles of the new faith Sāriputta and Moggallāna; Upāli, founder of the

[1] *India Census Reports*; E. Senart: *Caste in India*—Tr. E. Denison Ross, London, 1930; H. H. Risley, *Manual of Ethnography for India*, Calcutta, 1906; *The People of India*, Calcutta, 1915; Fick's comprehensive and attractive work, *Die sociale Gliederung im nordöstlichen Indien zu Buddha's Zeit* (1897) is unfortunately based upon the *Jātaka* stories which, though they contain very old legends, can hardly be said to represent the social structure of Magadha at the time of Buddha, having been written much later, perhaps as late as the 2nd century A.D.

[2] Paul Rosas: Caste and Class in India, *Science and Society*, Vol. VII, 1943, pp. 141–167 and my own criticism, *ibid.*, VIII, 1944, pp. 243–249.

[3] *The Oxford History of India* by V. A. Smith, 2nd edition revised and continued to 1921 by S. M. Edwardes; Oxford, 1922, p. 25.

[4] *Caste and Race in India* by G. S. Ghurye, London, 1932, p. 67.

[5] *Aṅguttara-nikāya* 1.14. English translation by F. L. Woodward: *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I (London, Pali Text Society, 1932), pp. 16–25: and the commentaries thereto.

monastic rule (Vinaya), was a barber; from the lowest castes were recruited Sopāka (= dog-eater) and the scavenger Sunīta, who both reached the final stage of freedom from *karma*; the early lay disciples, of both sexes, were almost all Vaiśyas. The final sentence of the quotation above is about as accurate as "The Roman patricians, measuring their strength against the Jews and failing in the attempt naturally turned their attention to the masses". The quotation, nevertheless, has great interest as a typical Brāhmaṇic document in its disregard of sources and facts, in its sweeping but puerile conclusions, and because it is used as a text-book on the subject. Nothing better could have been expected from a study which takes Brāhmaṇic scriptures, exclusively and at their face value, without critical attention to age, origin, and context.

In attempting to trace briefly the main features of the earlier caste system down to the age of the Buddha (5th century B.C.) we shall have to keep in mind the Brāhmaṇic origin of most Sanskrit texts, and the Brāhmaṇic transmission of all of them. As far as accurate historical evidence is concerned, most of these are mere verbiage; an occasional reference is all we have to piece out Indian history, the confusion being aggravated by fantastically ignorant late Brāhmaṇa commentators, as well as by the fact that it is a poor Sanskrit word that has less than a dozen meanings. Most kings of whom any record survives in the literary tradition have several names each while occasionally the same name has caused sagas of two or more distinct persons to be combined. The ludicrous errors to which the misreading of a single letter [1] can lead are often perpetuated by modern writers as sober historical truth. Finally, under a deceptive appearance of uniform backwardness, India is a country of enormous variation and long survivals; querns that might belong to the Stone Age are still used in our kitchens; red pigment on idols and stones by the road-side symbolizes blood-sacrifices most of which went out of fashion centuries ago so that the very idea would shock the particular worshippers. Thus, it is dangerous to attempt without a lifetime of study any complete description of an ancient and obsolete system. The method I follow, therefore, is to utilize a few representative sources (preferably with good published translations) of proved validity, outlining thereby the main developments. Greater detail is not possible without far more criticism, while the result would be unbalanced.

At every stage, I have tried to ask myself the question: What were the means of production implied by this particular bit of evidence? This is the only essential in which my approach differs from that of the essays available to me; it will be found to account for most of the differences in the conclusions.

2. The oldest Indian tradition known is supposedly that recorded in the four Vedas; in the order of sanctity and roughly of chronology, the Ṛg-, [2] Yajur-, Sāma-, and Atharva-veda.[3] These are liturgical books amplified in associated works called *Brāhmaṇa* [4] and *Āraṇyaka*. These scriptures concentrate upon ritual, any philosophy or history having to be painfully extracted, as with most early Brahmaṇic sources. This contrasts greatly with the much more philosophic if somewhat later *Upaniṣads*, the earliest of which have strongly influenced Buddhism and are

[1] Cf. V. V. Mirashi: Gāṅgeyadeva of Tirabhukti; *Annals of the Bhandarkar O.R. Institute*, Vol. XXIII, 1942, pp. 291–301.

[2] Cited as *RV*; any of the standard translations may be used, even the out of print versions of Griffiths or Grassmann.

[3] Cited as *AV*, using the translation (if selected portions) by M. Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, Oxford, 1897 (Sacred Books of the East, XLII).

[4] Of these, I cite for brevity mostly the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (associated with the Yajurveda) as *SB* from the English translation by J. Eggeling in Sacred Books of the East, Vols. XII, XXVI, XLI, XLIII, XLIV; Oxford, 1882–85–94–97–1900. Used and highly recommended for the general reader, but not cited is the *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* by A. A. Macdonnell and A. B. Keith, 2 vols., London (Murray), 1912.

undoubtedly of Kṣatriya origin. It should be kept in mind that each of the Vedas with its associated subordinate works forms in ancient days the property of one particular clan or sect of Brāhmaṇas who developed the tradition over a long period. The difficult ritual could be mastered by the acolyte only after long study (generally twelve years of celibate life) in the absolute service of a *guru*, often in the wilderness. Later changes, therefore, are not easy to trace though their existence cannot be denied. The passing centuries have obliterated a good deal so that certain hymns and words convey no real meaning even to the most optimistic commentator, e.g. *RV.* X. 106.6 which might be of Mesopotamian origin, as also perhaps the insistence upon clay bricks for the fire-altar, hardly to be expected of nomads such as the Aryans were in earlier Vedic times. The Iṣṭāśva and Iṣṭaraśmi of *RV.* I. 122.13 may even be Achaemenid kings of the 6th century B.C., which would not invalidate the claim to antiquity for the body of that Veda.

The Ṛgveda speaks of the four major castes, tribes being outside the then localized caste scheme. "Brāhmaṇa was his (the Supreme Being's) mouth, Kṣatriya made of his arms; the Vaiśya his thighs, and the Śūdra generated from his feet" (*RV.* X. 90.12), says the particularly sacred Puruṣasūkta hymn. Yet the four-caste system is not described as prevalent outside of India, where the earliest division into Arya and Dāsa was known to persist.[1] These two racial (or tribal) names later become synonymous with noble or freeborn and subject or slave (*RV.* IV. 28.4, II, 12.4), the latter being the general Sanskrit meaning of *dāsa*, in much the same way as the (contested) etymological change from Slav to slave. Yet not all the Dāsas of the early period are slaves or enemies. Divodāsa Atithigva is ruler by favour of Indra who is at once the chief of the gods and historically the titular ruler of the Aryan invaders. Priestly Divodāsas are also described as writing new hymns in *RV.* I. 130.10, while Sudās is the author of *RV.* X. 133. Vāmadeva, author of an entire section in the oldest Veda, speaks of bitter times before the ruthless Indra gave him patronage: (*RV.* IV. 18.12-13) "Who made thy mother a widow? Who sought to slay thee in lying still or moving? Which *deva* (god) had compassion for you when thou tookest thy sire by the foot and smashed him? In extreme need I cooked a dog's entrails; among the *devas* I found no comforter. I beheld my wife in degradation.[2] Then the Falcon (Indra) brought me the sweet (mead)." On the other hand, the third section of the Ṛgveda is ascribed to the great Kṣatriya Viśvāmitra, whose prowess is belittled by Brāhmaṇic stories of his vain contest with the Brāhmaṇa Vasiṣṭha, supposed author of the seventh section of the same Veda. But the Vasiṣṭha (also called Tṛtsu, *RV.* VII. 83.8) clan is associated in some way with Divodāsa and the Dāsas, hence originally belonged to the subjected population before climbing to the Vedic school. We see two main points here: the ancient Brāhmaṇa had a hard time; the priest class of the Aryan conquerors was largely recruited from the conquered.

The function of Vedic ritual is the celebration of certain animal sacrifices at the fire-altar. The five principal sacrificial animals are in order of importance: man, horse, bull (or cow), ram, he-goat (*SB.* VI. 2.1.18), and their flesh was to be eaten as is seen from rubrics for the disposal of the carcasses, as well as by the prohibition that five animals who simulate these are not to be eaten, namely the *kimpuruṣa*

[1] Even in later times. The Buddha says in the *Assalāyanasamyutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* "O Assalayana, in Yona, Kamboja, and such frontier regions, there are only two castes: Arya and Dāsa; and sometimes an Arya becomes a Dāsa while a Dāsa becomes an Arya. Do you acknowledge this?" The young Brāhmaṇa Assalāyana admits that this is so. For Divodāsa Atithigva, cf. H. D. Velankar, *Annals of the Bhandarkar O.R. Inst.*, XXIII, 1942, 657–668. Manusmṛti 10.45 implies the existence of Aryan-speaking people outside the fold of caste.

[2] I follow the Brāhmaṇic tradition of Sāyaṇa's gloss and Manusmṛti 10.106 in ascribing this to Vāmadeva himself, while scholars like Geldner and Velankar interpret this *ṛk* as Indra's.

(ape or dwarf), bos gaurus, bos gavaeus, camel, and *śarabha* (*SB*. I. 2.3). Cannibalism, however, is extinct except for ritual purposes in the Vedas; human sacrifice seems rather a traditional survival[1] like the Roman formula for capital punishment, *sacer esto*. The great Vedic sacrifice is that of the horse. This deserves consideration, for it was the horse that gave the Aryans (as it did the Mongols) their superiority in battle, possible their mobility as nomads, though the animal was not ridden but harnessed to a chariot. Indra's chariot is drawn by two tawny horses, yet his weapon, the *vajra*, is nothing but a stone hand-celt (identified with the thunderbolt when Indra became the synonym of the chief Aryan god) or perhaps a stone-headed mace of Sumerian type. We know that the principal vedic weapon was the bow, and that in addition to the horse and the chariot the Aryan invaders knew the use of iron. The Indus valley civilization knew only copper, weapons found in Mohenjo-Daro being so poor as to be useless for any except ceremonial purposes. The Dāsa opposition, therefore, must have been poor though the Vedas speak of their fortifications (*RV*. II. 19.6; VI. 20.10).

The emphasis upon the horse-sacrifice (*aśvamedha*) must necessarily date from the period when the horse was the most important domestic animal for the Aryans, as for the Mongols in historic times. That period, however, had obviously passed when the Vedic age was at its zenith, for the emphasis as far as productive economy is concerned is upon cattle, pastured in herds. Ploughing is comparatively late, mentioned in the *SB* only for ceremonial purposes; even here, both the ploughed and unploughed ground about the altar site must be sown after watering (*SB*. VII. 2.4.18). The principal cereal is barley (*yava*) into which the gods had put the essence of all other plants (*SB*. III. 6.1.10) and rice which was then obtained not by ploughing but by digging (*SB*. I. 2.3.7). But the priests' regular fee is payable in cattle as for example at the Daśapeya sacrifice for which twelve heifers with first calf are due (*SB*. V. 4.5.20), occasionally in gold chips, perhaps gold minas.

There is no question whatsoever of Brāhmaṇa superiority except at the altar-side. The Brāhmaṇa is acknowledged, even by himself, unsuited for kingship (*SB*. V. 1.1.12). Moreover, the aśvamedha is pre-eminently a Kṣatriya sacrifice (*SB*. XIII. 4.1.1.), at which apparently a Kṣatriya could officiate himself, the lame explanation being given ". . . and truly, whosoever sacrifices, sacrifices after becoming, as it were, a Brāhmaṇa" (*SB*. XIII. 4.1.3). The Brāhmaṇa is an object of respect *after* the king (*SB*. V. 4.2.7), and if the order of handing around the symbolic wooden sword used at the sacrifice makes the king weaker than the Brāhmaṇa, it is only to make the king stronger than his enemies (*SB*. V. 4.4.15). The social functions of caste are clearly set forth when it is stated that the Kṣatriya precedes on the outward sacrificial round, the Brāhmaṇa on the return, but never the other two castes. "And thus he encloses those two castes (Vaiśya and Śūdra) on both sides by the priesthood and nobility, and makes them submissive" (*SB*, VI, 4.4.13).

Final proof that Brāhmaṇa superiority was only in ritual is given by the story of king Janaka (*SB*. XI. 6.2), who defeats all the leading Brahmins, including the founder of the *SB*, Yājñavalkya himself, in interpretation of the philosophy of sacrifice as distinct from the ritual. The *sūtra* concludes with: "Thenceforth Janaka was a Brāhmaṇa". In fact, the Brāhmaṇa was worthy of respect only because of his connection with the *aśvamedha* ritual. "Those Kṣatriyas who go to the end of this (horse-sacrifice) will become (sharers of) the royal power, they will become kings worthy of being consecrated; but those who do not go to the end of this . . .

[1] But king Hariścandra, in fulfilment of a vow to sacrifice his eldest son, begins sacrifice a human substitute. Kalmāṣapāda is a cannibal (Mahābhārata 1.176) because of a curse. Human sacrifice later becomes symbolic just to avoid cannibalism, *SB*. XIII. 6.2.13. The last human *yajña* was traditionally by Śyāparṇa Sāyakāyana (*SB*. VI. 2.1.37 seq.).

will be excluded . . . And whenever ye meet with any kind of Brāhmaṇas, ask ye them 'O Brāhmaṇas, how much know ye of the *aśvamedha*?' and those who know naught thereof ye may despoil" (*SB*. XIII. 4.2.17).

3. For what follows, it is necessary to keep in mind certain general facts of agriculture. For a given area, the pastoral life will support from a dozen to a hundred times as many people as by hunting. Cultivation of cereals will support from four to twelve times as many as by grazing cattle for meat and dairy products. The present Indian population gets along today, admittedly at a very low subsistence level even in good years, on about 0·7 acres of cultivated land per head, while pasture land has long been insufficient for the number of cattle raised on it. Now, in a given region, as the population tends to increase, they must find a severe natural check, as in the extreme cases of the Arctic or the Kalahari, or must find more land, or change to a more productive form. The land of the Gangetic basin was swampy or densely forested while the older means of production developed in the drier Indus basin were profitable to an important class, the Brāhmaṇa priests, who had fixed upon certain religious forms which would hinder the development of any primitive community beyond a certain level. There was no trouble only as long as the system proved itself capable of expansion.

Even in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* days there was an ideological protest against beef-eating, presumably dictated or at least reinforced by economic necessity: The gods gave the cow and the ox the vigour of all other species; eating their flesh would be, as it were, an eating up of everything . . . "Such a one indeed would be likely to be (re-)born as a strange being (as one of whom there is) evil report, such as he has expelled an embryo from a woman, he has committed a sin . . . Nevertheless, Yājñavalkya said 'I, for one, eat it, provided that it is tender'" (*SB*. III. 1.2.21). The very originator of the *SB*. tradition refuses to budge.

The expansion towards the east is also clearly recorded, as well as its methods: "(Agni, the fire) thence went burning along the earth towards the east (from the Sarasvatī river); and Gotama Rāhugaṇa and the Videgha Māthava followed after him as he was burning along. He burnt over (dried up) all the rivers. Now that river which is called the overflowing (Sadānīrā)[1] flows from the northern (Himālaya) mountain; that one he did not burn over. That one the Brāhmaṇas did not cross over in former times, thinking it has not been burnt over by Agni Vaiśvānara. Nowadays, however, there are many Brāhmaṇas to the east of it. At that time, it (the land east of the Sadānīrā) was very uncultivated, because it had not been tasted by Agni Vaiśvānara. Nowadays, however, it is very cultivated, for the Brāhmaṇas have caused (Agni) to taste it through sacrifices. Even in late summer that river, as it were, rages along: so cold is it, not having been burnt over by Agni Vaiśvānara. Māthava Videgha then said (to Agni) 'Where am I to abide?' 'To the east of this (river) be thy abode', said he. Even now this river forms the boundary of the Kosalas and Videhas; for these are the Māthavas (descendants of Māthava)" (*SB*. I. 4.1.14–17).

The narrative is clear enough: the advance was by clearing land by burning it over; and swampy land thus dried up; the earlier drive was held up when the fire-followers came to a glacier-fed river which did not dry up in the summer. This means that the advance was not along the banks of major rivers, but along the foot-

[1] On the basis of Sāyaṇa's gloss which cites *Amarakośa* 1.10.33, this river has been identified with the modern Kurrattee by Weber and others. However, commentators on the *Amarakośa* take the *Karatoyā* and the *Sadānīrā* as two separate rivers. Prof. D. Kosambi's emendation of a single letter in Sāyaṇa's text of the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.1.1, to read *vaṅgā-magadhāś-cerapādāḥ* would give excellent meaning to the passage on which Sāyaṇa's commentary on this and *RV*. VII. 101.4 is quite absurd. The sense then would be that *the people of eastern Bihar and nomads (or gypsies) did not believe in Vedic ritual.*

hills, and that is precisely what we find by looking through Buddhistic records of settlement. The riparian lands of the Gangetic basin must, with a few strategic exceptions, have been far too densely wooded and swampy to be cleared by fire alone. In any case, this type of early clearing would account for so many sacred places being in the Himālayas as well as for the late transfer of the capital of Magadha (Bihār) from Rājagṛha to Patna.

The Brāhmaṇas of this later period show a corresponding adjustment. The last of the four Vedas (*AV*) is a much more social document than the rest. From concentration upon the expensive fire-sacrifice, it has come down to everyday witchcraft, designed for personal gain of all social grades, though not to smooth out the difficulties of human intercourse. There are charms to cure disease and possession by demons of disease; prayers for long life; incantations for the obtaining of a husband or wife, a son; charms for royalty, and for success in battle. Far more important are the charms for harmony and influence in assembly for they show that Aryan tribal affairs were still regulated by assembly in spite of the conquest (*AV*. III. 30; VII. 12, etc.). Fields, the house, cattle, can be protected by formula; the seed is blessed at sowing (*AV*. VI. 142), exorcised of vermin infesting the grain (*AV*. VI. 50). There are prayers for success in gambling (*AV*. IV, 38; VII. 50), and the merchant has his own prayer for successful venture (*AV*. III. 15) with a hundredfold gain "of wealth through wealth".

Naturally, the Brāhmaṇa takes smaller fees, generally a porridge (*AV*. XI. 1; XII. 3) prepared in a special way. But that doesn't mean that he has given up beef-eating. Sterile cows must be given away to the Brāhmaṇas; if a heifer that has proved sterile after herding for three years be not given away to mendicant Brāhmaṇas, dire consequences will follow for both herd and owner; gain can only result by giving the creature to the Brāhmaṇas, though what they could do with it except eat it does not transpire; on no account is the owner to roast the barren cow for himself (*AV*. XII. 4)! Beyond this, the Brāhmaṇa has to protect himself and his own cattle by imprecations, and cajolery (*AV*. V. 18.3) "do not, o prince (eat the cow) of the Brāhmaṇa: sapless, unfit to be eaten, is that cow". Prince here means a knight, any member of the Kṣatriya caste with any sort of local power.

However, there is no question of the Brāhmaṇas turning "their attention to the masses", except to help in their exploitation. The Brahmanic idea of the position of the two lower castes is seen in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* vii, 29 (A. B. Keith, H.O.S., Vol. 25, p. 315): ". . . like a Vaiśya, tributary to another, to be eaten by another, to be oppressed at will . . . like a Śūdra, . . . the servant of another, to be removed at will, to be slain at will". This view of the trader class characterizes the almost penal theory of taxation which we find in the *Arthaśāstra*. The Kṣatriya here is at the top of the social stratification, for even the Brāhmaṇa is only one who receives sacrificial gifts from him; however, the Brāhmaṇa can embroil the Kṣatriya with the people by mischief at the sacrifice, so that the nobility have to be careful. Finally, we may note that the Vaiśya in the Vedas is merely an Aryan whose trade is not that of fighting or fire-priesthood; also, that honoured Vedic professions or crafts such as that of the tanner, weaver, smith, chariot-maker, are confined in later days to Śūdras, who are un-Aryan in the earliest days. This shows how the early caste system corresponded to the progressive development of a *class* society, which, with its counterpoise the absolute monarch, developed naturally from conquest and settlement by a democratic or oligarchic tribal organization which originally characterized the racially distinct invaders. A rudimentary four-caste (= class) system similar to the Indian can also be traced in Iranian tradition. It should not be forgotten, on the credit side of the caste system, that the early reduction of the *Śūdra* to serfdom or helotage freed India from slavery and slave-trading on a large scale. It also allowed new land to be opened up and settled with an early

development of a stable agrarian economy which gave the country its economic power as well as its basic unity in spite of great local variations. Of course, when expansion stopped, this led inevitably to a static ideal of society, a static philosophy (even to the static yogic system of exercise), hence ultimately to stagnation. But we are not concerned here with that stage of growth where caste becomes a negation of history. It seems reasonable to conclude that the lack of private property in human beings also implied the absence of private property in land (except for valuable urban sites) at the early stage with which we are concerned.

As long as the Kṣatriya is one of a numerous conquering tribe, this is perhaps inevitable; the Brāhmaṇa has no protection except his own usefulness as priest and the mantle of the witch-doctor. But with the growth of settlement and kingship on a larger scale, the Brāhmaṇa suffers another dialectic change: "Listen ye to the high praise of the king who rules over all peoples, the god who is above mortals, of Vaiśvānara Parikṣit! 'Parikṣit has procured for us a secure dwelling, when he, the most excellent one, went to his seat'. (Thus) the husband in Kuru-land, when he founds his household, converses with his wife. 'What may I bring thee, curds, stirred drink, or liquor?' (Thus) the wife asks her husband in the kingdom of king Parikṣit. Like light the ripe barley runs over beyond the mouth (of the vessels). The people thrive merrily in the kingdom of king Parikṣit" (*AV*. XX. 127.7–10).

This king Parikṣit, here raised to the supreme eminence of deified fire is a historical personage who came to the throne after the great war described in the epic, *Mahābhārata* (Mbh.). And the Brahmins who monopolized the Atharva-veda belong to the combined Bhṛgu-Aṅgiras clans. They are comparative late comers in the vedic period for the Vasiṣṭhas alone claimed monopoly of the yajña priesthood at one time (Ṣadviṃśa Brāhmaṇa 1.5) and this was disputed by the Bhṛguid Jamadagni (Taittirīya Saṃhitā IV. 1.7.3). With this, we turn to the great Indian epic.

4. The Mahābhārata epic deals in 100,000 stanzas[1] with a great civil war between the five Pāṇḍava brothers and the hundred Kaurava sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Generally available texts of this work contain substantial additions down to quite recent times but we are fortunate in possessing a critical edition[2] for the first five books which strips away later accretions in a manner brilliantly confirmed by fresh discoveries of comparatively old manuscripts. This critical text represents in the main some kind of a unitary redaction by one or more diaskeuasts of not later than the 3rd century A.D., but the subject matter is far older tradition given in narratives not always properly worked into the structure of the epic. A good deal of this subject matter was obviously repulsive[3] to the scribes who transmitted the epic manuscript apparatus, but not on that account deleted by them; their method was to dilute the most disagreeable portions by explanatory interpolations, and just ignore the rest. The continued popularity of the text must have been due in great part to these continually added and readjusted subsidiary narratives, and this popularity was not only very profitable to the reciters but performed an important social function by enabling them to write in a considerable amount of social and religious doctrine, the most important section of this type being the famous *Bhagavadgītā*. For us the use of the Mahābhārata lies in the picture of society that it builds up, though not always in a homogeneous or consistent fashion.

[1] For the actual number, and criticism of the structure of the epic, see my paper on the *Parvasaṃgraha*, J. Am. Oriental Soc., vol. 66, 1946, pp. 110–117.

[2] By the late Vishnu S. Sukthankar. I cite only this edition, as Mbh. A passable translation exists (though not used here) by P. C. Roy, Calcutta, 1883–1896, but as this is based upon the Vulgate text (Calcutta, 1836), references will not coincide.

[3] E. W. Hopkins: *The Great Epic of India*, New York, 1901. This again refers to the uncritical Vulgate text, but is quite useful. For the point in question, see the concluding chapters.

About the preservation of ancient tradition,[1] against the fact of radically changed custom, there can be no doubt at all. After the great battle, the dead were left to lie on the field. The princess Mādrī is purchased as a bride for Pāṇḍu without any more ceremony than for a basket of vegetables (Mbh. 1.105.4-5), though a long passage is interpolated in many versions to explain this as an ancient custom of her tribe, the noble Madras. The Brāhmaṇa Droṇa teaches archery to the princes for money, and this is explained by a brilliant and pathetic interpolation (after Mbh. 1.122.31) as reaction after seeing his little boy, who had never tasted cow's milk, tricked by richer men's sons with mixture of flour and water. As a matter of fact, however, the desire for money is real and quite straightforward, for a little earlier Droṇa has learned the decidedly un-Brāhmaṇic trade of arms only because he could not get the alternative, wealth (Mbh. 1.121.18–21), from Paraśurāma. Even more striking is the evidence regarding diverse marriage customs, particularly for group-marriages in the older period. The sage Śvetaketu, son of Uddālaka, is disturbed in his wilderness retreat when a Brāhmaṇa drags off his mother by the hand with the words "let's go". To the angry sage, his unperturbed father gives the explanation "women of all castes are unrestrained (or *naked*); like cows, they (breed) progeny within each caste". Uddālaka's simile, we remark parenthetically, receives some support from the etymology of *gotra* (clan) which means "cowpen". Śvetaketu then establishes the rule by force (*balāt*) that women shall be monogamous and men shall not violate a virgin, a chaste woman, or a continent one. All of this is given as a tradition (Mbh. 1.113.9–20). But this is not the only curious tradition, for Mbh. 1.112 is devoted to the unattractive story of king Vyuṣitāśva whose childless queen Bhadrā finally conceives from his corpse. A survival of group marriage customs seem to me to be a better explanation of the five Pāṇḍava brothers' polyandrous union with the princess Draupadī than the hypothesis that these Pāṇḍavas were Tibetan invaders. In fact, Yudhiṣṭhira says to his shocked prospective father-in-law, who regards polyandry as being against common usage and the Vedas, that he (Yudhiṣṭhira) doesn't claim to know the finer points of religion, but "we wish to follow the ancient traditional path" (Mbh. 1.187.26–28). The mother of the princes cites the case of the seven sages who had a common wife Jaṭilā (Mbh. 1.188.14); finally Vyāsa, reputed author of the Mbh. turns up in person to explain the whole affair as inevitable by the convenient hypothesis of a curse in some previous birth! Clearly, we have here some historic pre-Aryan custom which had to be explained away. It is not a theological addition as for example the regaining of her virginity by Kuntī (Mbh. 1.104.12) or by Draupadī (Mbh. 1.191.13-14) which were necessary if the later official marriages of these ladies were to be valid.

This welter of contradictory traditions, apart from diverting interest, has damaged even the main theme of the war. The Pāṇḍavas have no less a personage than Kṛṣṇa, incarnated Viṣṇu, on their side, and this god is thereafter one of the most important deities of the Hindu pantheon. But they win only by consistent cheating and legalitarian quibbles. The twelve years during which they agree to remain incognito in the wilderness are not really over when they reveal themselves; the noble and venerable Bhīṣma, their own teacher Droṇa are killed by deceit; the heroic and generous Karṇa (actually their brother) treacherously shot down against the rules of war; Duryodhana's thigh is shattered by a foul blow. Such dealings, combined with the tradition that Jaimini's rival version of the Mbh. (a fragment of which is still in existence) was destroyed because it did not exalt the Pāṇḍavas

[1] For the relationship between the Mbh. and the rewritten Purāṇas, cf. W. Ruben, *J. Royal Asiatic Soc.*, 1941, pp. 247–256; 337-338; *F. W. Thomas Festschrift*, pp. 188 sq. For the most reasonable attempt to reconstruct some historical truth from Purāṇic records: F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*.

sufficiently as against the defeated Kauravas, have led to the theory that the epic has been rewritten from its original form of a lament for the vanquished into flattery for the conquerors. As a matter of fact, evidence of rewriting is only too noticeable, but the purpose is deeper than mere flattery of some historical dynasty.

The Mahābhārata (like the *AV* and the law-code Manusmṛti) also was property of the Bhārgava clan, who rewrote [1] it for their own purpose. Their hero, the Bhārgava Paraśurāma, seems to have been the only authentic Bhārgava who could fight (his traditional weapon being the curved axe *paraśu*) and who annihilated the Kṣatriyas no less than twenty-one times. This superfluous killing is really a form of overcompensation, or psychological revenge; for it is clear that the Bhṛguids were generally trampled down, the Kṣatriyas not annihilated, and that a single annihilation should have sufficed. The revenge is carried further in unconvincing fashion by stating that successive generations of Kṣatriyas had to be begotten by Brāhmaṇas from Kṣatriya women. The fact of the matter is that the Brāhmaṇas were helpless; when Bhṛgu was offended by the Sṛñjaya Vaitahavyas or a Brāhmaṇa's cow taken, it was the slaughtered cow herself and not the owner that took revenge upon the transgressors (*AV*. V. 18.10-11; V. 19.1). The Bhṛgus appear as a historical people in the *RV*, but only three or four times. They are undoubtedly associated with the Druhyus, though whether as warriors or as priests is not clear for the Bhārgava chariot appears in *RV*. IV. 16.20. Moreover, they were on the losing side, for the king of the Druhyus was killed in battle against Sudās. We have here one possible mechanism by which the conquered sages could appear as priests [2] of the conquerors, for by this time the Aryans had unquestionably begun to fight against each other, having advanced as far east as the Jamunā river. Still, we see from the Paraśurāma legend that the Brāhmaṇas at one time attempted fighting against the Kṣatriyas, and this should lend support to the conjecture that the Brāhmaṇas belong to an older type of society than the invading Aryan Kṣatriyas. How could they have developed any sort of culture had they always been living in the wilderness, either solitary or each sage with his women and a handful of celibate disciples? It is at least plausible to assume that these Brāhmaṇas were associated with the rich pre-Aryan Indus valley culture, discovered by our archaeologists; a culture that may have been destroyed by Aryan invaders or died out because of the shift of the Indus. This passage-over of sections of the conquered as priests to the conquerors would account for the many discrepancies between Vedic and epic records, and for the rewriting of so much Indian tradition. It would account also for the early systematic development of Sanskrit grammar, generally necessary when a complicated foreign language has to be studied. In the same way, the astounding development of religious philosophy in India at a very early date again supports the hypothesis of violent assimilation as it speaks for the unhappy existence of a cultured priest-class. One notes that though the Aryan system of counting is decimal, if any

[1] V. S. Sukthankar: *Epic Studies VI*: The Bhṛgus and the Bhārata; *A Text-Historical Study. Annals of the Bhandarkar O.R. Inst.*, XVIII, 1–76; Collected Works, Vol. I, 278–337.

[2] The special position of the Bhṛgus is due to a fact not brought out in Sukthankar's profound analysis of the Mbh., namely that they were able to assimilate Kṣatriya priests by adoption. Vītahavya becomes a Bhṛguid Brāhmaṇa by the word of Bhṛgu himself, according to Mbh., 15.30 (Vulgate) in spite of the Srñjaya Vaitahavyas being accursed in *AV* passages cited! The canonical Sanskrit writings on *gotra* and *pravara* have been collected by P. Chentsal Rao: *Gotrapravarinabandhakadamba*, Mysore (Govt. Or. Lib. Series, Bibliotheca Sanskrita, 25), 1900. The introduction shows that the last ten of the eighteen official Brāhmaṇa clans, i.e. the "occasional (*kevala*) Bhṛgus or Aṅgirasas" adopted Kṣatriyas extensively. The current interpretation is, naturally, that these were originally Brāhmaṇas who had followed the trade of arms for a while and so had to be readopted into the priesthood, but a look at the genealogies shows conclusively that they are Kṣatriya by lineage. This means, clearly, assimilation of the priest-caste of the conquerors into the Bhṛgu-Aṅgiras clan of the conquered.

system can properly be called Aryan, the quadragesimal system is still extant in Indian currency, goes back to the dual weight-system of Mohenjo-Daro, and is reflected in Piṅgala's work on Vedic metre. The Brāhmaṇa sages in the wilderness then correspond to Abraham, who left Ur of the Chaldees for a nomadic life when the days of the city's glory had passed; of course, the Brāhmaṇas may have been driven out by the ruin of their cities, and had in any case a fairly hard time of it; retreat to the wilderness, particularly in old age, remains thereafter an integral portion of the ideal human life for Hindus. Naturally, such origins would also account for several features of caste, including endogamy.

For the later stage of rewriting in the Mahābhārata, we see one further immediate reason: the pre-existence of Buddhism. In the main, all direct reference to Buddhism is carefully avoided in the epic, which does its best to give the (modified) traditions of antiquity. Still, in the appendix,[1] the *Harivaṁśa* (cited as Hv. from Kiṃjavadekar's edition), we find direct mention of the fact that well got-up Śūdra monks would get religious honour as followers of the Śākya Buddha (Hv. 3.3.15) while Brāhmaṇas took to the woods for fear of taxes. All such historical events of later date are ingeniously disguised as prophecies; this section of the Hv. has influenced two parallel "prophecies" in Mbh. 3. 186–189, about the dark ages, the Kaliyuga which begins with the coronation of just that king Parīkṣit who was so highly praised in the *AV*. Naturally, as part of the prophecy, it is not out of place to mention—indirectly—Puṣyamitra (Hv. 3.2.40) as having performed the horse sacrifice before the end of the Kali age. One is led to believe that the Kalki (later the future avenging incarnation of Viṣṇu) with whom the Kaliyuga is to end (Mbh. 3.188-189; Hv. 1.41. 164–168) is also a historical personage, some minor leader who locally repelled invaders that pushed into India over the ruins of empire after the 1st century B.C. He managed to please the Brāhmaṇas by reviving fire-sacrifices. What speaks most distinctly for the existence of some intermediate form between the Vedic and the epic period, however, is the rise of new deities, and the profession of a new philosophy. The epic is read by or recited to modern Hindus, and in spite of its numerous logical inconsistencies, is within their mental grasp; the Vedas are not.

Vedic deities, Indra and the sacred fire, occur often enough, but in a subordinate position. Some of the elements that appear can be discounted as ancient survivals, particularly the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu which contain a typical later Brāhmaṇic synthesis of various cults—of which the Fish, Tortoise, Boar, may even be Mesopotamian, connected as they are with the legend of the flood which actually was a historical event according to Woolley's excavations at Ur. The dwarf Vāmana may represent some struggle of the Aryans against Assyrians, as perhaps his predecessor the man-lion Nṛsiṃha. Paraśurāma is a Bhārgava hero, Rāma some ancient Indian hero apparently pre-Aryan, though with him the psychological element may account for the Helen-of-Troy motif. Psychoanalysts have taught us to regard such themes as Karṇa's being set afloat on the river by his mother and drawn from the waters

[1] Though it ranks as the appendix, actually this section of the Hv. at least is the prototype of the two prophecies in Mbh., 186–189. A detailed comparison shows content as well as phrases in common, as for example between Hv. 3.3.12 and Mbh. 3.188.51 = 3.186.36; generally between Hv. 4.3-4 and Mbh. 3.186, 188. The Hv. account is shorter and more coherent, as well as more *reasonable*. For example, Mbh. 3.188.47-8 paralleled by Mbh. 3.186.52-53 says in describing the evils of the dark ages that girls would give birth to children at the fifth or sixth year, males would beget them at seven or eight, and that the limit of life would be sixteen years. The last two figures are 16 and 30 in Hv. 3.3.11 and 3.4.40. The general Paurāṇic list of evils of the Kali age is entirely different. The relationship between these sources and the Purāṇas is very complicated; one possible explanation would be that various local accounts were later arranged in uniform chronological sequence. Taxing Brahmins is naturally the supreme evil (Manusmṛti 7.133), no matter how desperate the need!

by his foster-parents as a symbolic representation of birth [1]; this may also account for the sage Mārkaṇḍeya's vision (prototype of Arjuna's vision in the *Bhagavad-gītā*) of the divine Babe asleep on the flood (Mbh. 3.186.82–3.187.47). But the latest *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa is the dominating religious figure of the Mahābhārata, and his cult, all-embracing faith *bhakti* in the one supreme being, has appeared for the first time in contrast to anything that has preceded. This Kṛṣṇa, the non-Aryan [2] "dark" hero or god has appeared in several earlier legends, as Kṛṣṇa-Dionysos, Kṛṣṇa-Herakles, Kṛṣṇa the Lar of the Yādava tribe, even as an opponent of Indra in a contested passage of the Ṛgveda (*RV.* VIII. 96.13–15), but not in the rôle of an object for salvation-giving *bhakti*. *Kṛṣṇa* generally appears as an adjective for the "dark people", the indigenous opponents slaughtered by the Aryans. It is remarkable that Vṛtra, the demon of darkness for whose killing Indra is praised in the Veda (and as Verethraghna in Avestan tradition) counts as a Brāhmaṇa in Mahābhārata times. That Indra kills his own fire-priest (purohita) Viśvarūpa is surely proof that the Brāhmaṇas are not inviolate in vedic days. But the heroes of the epic, the Pāṇḍava brothers, are already a mixed lot, Arjuna being dark, as is also their common wife Draupadī.

Similarly, the all-powerful position of certain Bhārgava sages who even seem to beget a considerable number of Kṣatriya princes can be explained psychologically, but not so the strange doctrine of *ahiṃsā*, non-killing, uttered by a curse-transformed sage. "*Ahiṃsā* is the supreme religion for all living beings, therefore let the Brāhmaṇa not kill living things; ahiṃsa, truthful speech, resolute forgiveness, mastery of the Vedas are the highest religion of the Brāhmaṇas" (Mbh. 1.11.12, 14). This has a very strange sound indeed in a huge work dedicated to tales of slaughter, recited at Nāga-killing *yajña* sacrifices, a work in which the heroes and even the god Kṛṣṇa himself, with attendant Brāhmaṇas in plenty, clear land in the Vedic manner by burning down the entire Khāṇḍava forest and killing those who try to escape, in a holocaust which only six living creatures survive (Mbh. 1.214–219). The explanation of these anomalies is, naturally, the intermediate position of a totally new form of life, that during the Buddhistic age, which necessarily forced changes upon the Brāhmaṇas.

5. Vedic Brāhmaṇism had already become uneconomic in the days of the Buddha. Instead of the moderate fees of Vedic times, we find whole villages given over to the Brāhmaṇas in fief for their services at the sacrifice, though of course it was only the more fortunate Brāhmaṇa that would receive such gifts. In the *Dīgha-nikāya* 3, 4, 5, 12 we learn that king Pasenadi had given the village of Ukkaṭṭhā to the Brāhmaṇa Pokkharasāti, Mālavaṭikā to another, Lohicca; from Bimbisāra, special friend of the Buddha, the Brāhmaṇas Soṇadaṇḍa and Kūṭadanta held Campā and Khāṇumata respectively. Naturally, the sacrifices implied by such fees are on a much greater scale than those of the Vedas. In the *Kosalasaṃyutta* we read of king Pasenadi's great *yajña* where 500 (in early Pāli literature the equivalent of "a large number") each of bulls, male calves, female calves, goats, rams were tied to sacrificial posts for killing, and the king's slaves, messengers, workmen go about

[1] Otto Rank: *Der Mythus von der Geburt des Helden*, Versuch einer psychologischen Mythendeutung [2nd Edition, Wien, 1922]. Matter for the psychoanalyst are also the excessive ritual purification of the Brāhmaṇa, the purely theoretical classification of metres many of which seem never to have existed, the fantastically large number of years in some *yuga* systems, the minute divisions of space and time which seem well beyond the power of definition of any instruments these theorists could even have imagined.

[2] Apart from their dark colour, tradition also removes both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna from the Kṣatriya caste, though they are fighters, cf. Pāṇini 4.3.88-9. Of course, the commentator here tries to explain this away by saying that being a divinity, Kṛṣṇa could not be ranked as a Kṣatriya.

their duties shedding tears,[1] in fear of punishment; for, apparently, the beasts were taken without compensation from the surrounding countryside. The Buddha himself speaks of five great traditional yajñas; the aśvamedha, the human sacrifice, the *samyakpāśa*, the *vājapeya*, and the *nirargala*. Of these the first two are Vedic and even the fourth is known to Vedic literature, though more complicated. But the remaining two are not generally known and there is no reason to doubt that sacrifices were growing in complexity and magnitude. The Buddhist protest is therefore against sacrifices rather than against caste[2] as such, though naturally it would affect the caste that lived by sacrificial fees, the Brāhmaṇas. On the other hand, these sacrifices imply other types of killing than at the fire-altar, for their main purpose is success in war. The older type of society has passed. Aryans are no longer migrants or wanderers with the possible exception of a tribe like the Vajjis,[3] who also preserve the older tribal institutions including supreme power for the oligarchic assembly (upon which the Buddhist monastic order of peripatetic almsmen was modelled in its own way), and are much admired by the Buddha himself. For the rest, the tribes have dissolved into loose organizations of landholding and land-farming overlords, and because of this dissolution, newer types of kingship on a larger scale are growing up. For example, Buddha's own people the Sakkas are not independent, being subordinate to king Pasenadi of Kosala (*Dīgha-nīkāya* 27); while Buddha's father is so small a princeling that he engages in ploughing, perhaps of a ceremonial nature, but in the fields and not for the fire-altar. The Sakkas still elect[4] a tribal chief who seems to have had very little to do. The *gotra* divisions for Kṣatriyas clearly corresponded to the *gens* elsewhere, and was adopted (and retained to this day) by the Brāhmaṇas if they did not have it themselves in earlier times. It is significant that a considerable number of *gotra* names are animal totems[5]: *kauśika* = owl, *kāśyapa* = tortoise, *bharadvāja* = skylark, *gotama* = best bull, while the oldest Brāhmaṇas like the Vasus can at most be assigned descent from the sun and the Bhṛgus have no animal totem to explain their ancestor. Similarly, the *pravara* is clearly the original phratry, its confused position being more easily explained if the whole gens-phratry organization was borrowed by the Brāhmaṇas from the Kṣatriyas after the conquest.

The Buddhistic world is divided into small cities grouped under sixteen kingdoms (Aṃguttara-nikāya III, 7.70; trans. I, p. 192), some of which have already lost their independence and the rest of which are constantly fighting to increase

[1] Also, *Majjhimanikāya*, 51.

[2] Against Brāhmaṇic caste-superiority pretensions, cf. the *Vāseṭṭhasutta* which occurs both in the *Suttanipāta* and the *Majjhimanikāya*. For all Buddhistic references I have drawn extensively upon the Marāthi writings of my father Prof. Dharmānanda Kosambī; particularly, *Bhagavān Buddha* (Nāgpur, 1940-41) and *Bauddha Saṃghācā Paricaya*.

[3] For the Vajjis or Licchavis, the *Mahāparinibbāṇasutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. Under *vrātya*, Macdonnell and Keith (note 9) show that wandering non-ritual Aryans were meant, and this seems to be equivalent to the Vajjis, though naturally the Brāhmaṇic connotation of *vrātya* later comes to be a low person, while the Licchavis remain Kṣatriyas very high in social rank, even to a thousand years later, cf. *Oxford Hist. Ind.*, 147-8, and Samudragupta's inscriptions in Fleet's collection. See also J. W. Hauer: *Der Vrātya: Untersuchungen über die nichtbrahmanische Religion Altindiens*; Vol. I: *die vrātya als nichtbrahmanische Kultgenossenschaften arischer Herkunft* (Stuttgart, 1927). It may be noted in this connection that the noblest truths, aims, ways are indicated by the adjective *ārya* in Buddhist scriptures. *The new religion founded by the Buddha looked to that branch of the Aryan tradition which* (in spite of *AV*, XV) *was not penetrated by the Brāhmaṇas.*

[4] For the non-hereditary Sakka chief (king), see the story of Bhaddiya in the *Cullavagga* (vii) of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Tr. H. Oldenberg, *Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford, 1885, Vol. XX, pp. 227–230); for Suddhodana and all his "courtiers" setting their own hands to the plough, the introduction (*Nidāna*) to the *Jātaka* stories (C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, H.O.S., Vol. 3, 1922, p. 54).

[5] Remnants of totemism or an attempt to assimilate totems of invaders to pre-existing gods may perhaps be seen in the animal *vāhanas* of Hindu gods.

their rules, whence the need for fire-sacrifices that bring victory. The centre of expansion is Magadha (the eastern part of modern Bihār) itself peripheral in the older Aryan-Brāhmaṇic expansion. It is Ajātasattu, parricide son of Bimbisāra who finally breaks the Vajjis and extends his dominion to the whole Gangetic basin; in the *Sāmaññaphalasaṃyutta*, he is praised as a wise ruler, one who would have reached the highest degree of spiritual attainment—but for the sad fact of his having murdered his own father! Clearly, the traders and householders needed a settled rule, peace and freedom from robbers who infested the jungles between city-states, some form of "universal" monarchy; it must again be noted that Buddhism and the other non-killing religion Jainism are most popular with this class, which is otherwise silent in Indian history.

The existence of the protest we have already seen in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* passage against beef-eating, though beef continued to be sold in the open market in Buddha's time (*Satipaṭṭhānasutta*). The original proponent of the new ideas for society was the Jaina *tīrthaṃkara* Pārśva, who laid emphasis two centuries before the Buddha upon the active social practice of non-killing, truthfulness, non-violence. There were other lines of teachers[1] who had developed from the ascetic hermits whom Brāhmaṇism itself regarded so highly; and Buddhist as well as Jain teachers found the pre-existing ascetic form of life one which gave the preacher greatest influence. Jain *ahiṃsā* was carried to unpractical extremes for society as a whole, while the Buddhist applied primarily to human beings and agricultural animals: for the Buddha says in the *Brāhmaṇadhammika-sutta* of the *Suttanipāta* "Cattle are our friends just as parents and other relatives; for, cultivation depends upon them. They give food, strength, freshness of complexion, and happiness. Knowing this, ancient Brāhmaṇas did not kill cattle." But the greatest power of the Buddhist doctrine springs from its social nature as against the rugged individualism or greedy opportunism of other systems. In the *Kūṭadantasutta* (*Dīghanikāya* 5) the Buddha relates the story of a supposed king Mahāvijita who gained happiness and prosperity for his people not by *yajña* but by supplying capital to the trader, employment to the State servant, seed to the farmer for "then the robberies will vanish". In the *Cakkavattisīhanāda-sutta* we find the same theme enlarged upon: it is the poor that take to robbery, and the function of the *cakravartin*, the universal monarch, is to prevent robbery; it cannot be suppressed by violence, nor can its cause, poverty, be bribed out of existence with bounties. Poverty is to be decreased by creating employment. This, surely, is a sound and remarkably modern view of the problem. While the Buddhist emperor Asoka did not go so far as this, his very first edict sets the example of non-killing.

To the question of *why* the new form had to arise, we have answered that the older was uneconomic after the change from nomadic pasturing to settled agriculture. Why it had to take on a religious aspect is clear enough, for the older form was bound up with the very existence of a class that lived by sacrifice; hence, the validity of the sacrificial idea, of killing itself, had to be denied; the revolution, inevitably in primitive times, had to take on a religious aspect. The actual mechanism of the change is by preaching through the mouths of respected ascetic teachers. But there is something more to the change than this. In the first place, it occurs in marginal lands, where the Vedic forms are not well-established and where the tendency to universal monarchy is growing rapidly. The Brāhmaṇas themselves show strong divergence from Vedic practices, for Magadhan Brāhmaṇas are referred to with special contempt as *Brahmabandhu*, being definitely associated with extra-vedic *Vrātyas*, while it is not generally noticed that the Purāṇas refer to kings of the

[1] For accounts of six other sects contemporary with the Buddha, cf. the *Cūḷasāropama-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*; also the *Sāmaññaphalasaṃyutta*; the 63 sects of the *Brahma-jālasutta* represent a much later account.

line to which Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu belong as *kṣatrabandhu*,[1] the termination *bandhu* having the force of the Italian—*accio*. Brāhmaṇas are themselves penetrating into hitherto unknown regions as pioneers, which is seen from the story of the Buddha's disciple Bāvarī, who had founded a Brahmanic refuge on the banks of the Godavari; but this expansion takes place without a corresponding Kṣatriya conquest, which should account for the existence of only two major castes (Brāhmaṇa, Śūdra) in South India. Clearly, such civilization as existed had managed to develop expansionist tendencies in a larger population in a way that the cattle-breeding Vedic period could not do. Magadhan is synonymous with trader in Manusmṛti 10.47.

The cow does not thrive in wet lands, though it could have done well enough in the Indus valley. The cow is not hardy enough to hold out against wild beasts in the forest. The swampy lower territory of the Gangetic basin could only have been opened out for a new type of agriculture, wet-rice cultivation, by a new animal, the less edible water-buffalo. I suggest that the period of this change also corresponds to change from the older Brāhmaṇism to non-violent religions, though such changes have left virtually no trace in literature. Vedic rice is *vrīhi*, while the general Vedic term for cereal is *yava*, barley, and the Vedas speak also of *godhūma*, wheat. The famous *śāli* variety of rice, though known early in the Punjab (where the grammarian Pāṇini comes from the village of Śālātura) seems to be principally cultivated in Bihār, even as late as the time of the Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang. The buffalo is not a Vedic animal at all, and must have been a terrifying beast in earlier times for Yama, the god of death, comes riding on it to claim the souls of human beings at their final moments; Yama himself, with his twin sister Yami, shows definite Mesopotamian affinities or possibly origin.[2] The goddess Kāli or Durgā, afterwards synthesized by Brāhmaṇas with Pārvati, consort of Śiva, saves mankind by killing the buffalo-demon, an act still commemorated by buffalo-sacrifices at her festival. The buffalo is rare while the horse does not occur on Mohenjo-Daro seals, where the bull is common. *Mahiṣa* in the Vedas is an adjective, meaning powerful, and *mahiṣī mṛgaḥ* means just the "powerful beast". But by the time of Pāṇini *mahiṣmat* "rich in buffalos" is a term of respect. The *Kāśyapa saṃhitā* represents a forlorn Brāhmanic attempt to preserve the superiority of the cow, in that the buffalo is a wilder creature, feeding in the woods on leaves that might bear insects and spoil its milk. But it is known to all modern observers that in reality the buffalo is far the cleaner feeder of the two, the cow (like the pig) being a scavenger in densely settled localities. By the opening centuries of the Christian era, the buffalo is bred regularly for profit, ranking in this above the cow and below the horse, according to the *Pañcatantra* (V. 8). It is the change-over to this new productive method that would enable Brāhmanic control of ritual to be overcome in times when ritual was all-important, for the Brāhmaṇas hadn't then troubled to develop any ceremony connected with the buffalo in the same way as the Vedic ritual is related to the cow.

Thus we get the dark ages of the Brāhmaṇas, though a few of them gained wealth as ministers, while four even ruled as kings[3] after the end of the Śuṅga

[1] F. E. Pargiter: *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, Oxford, 1913, p. 22, v. 16, Pargiter himself is puzzled by *rājānaḥ kṣatrabaṇdhavaḥ* which he mistranslates on p. 69 as "kings with kṣatriya kinsfolk".

[2] Yama and the three flood-avatāras are not the only such Indo-Mesopotamian affinities from literary sources. For example, *timiṅgila* and *timiṅgilagila*, where the reduplicated ending must originally have been *-gala*. The earliest Asuras are, of course, to be understood as Assyrians. The Jātakas mention sailing to Babylon (Bāveru); on the other hand, the Purāṇas show an acquaintance with the sources of the Nile which surprised even their discoverer, Speke, but these documents were rewritten at a period much later than the one under discussion.

[3] Cāṇakya is the most famous of Brāhmaṇa ministers. For the Kāṇvāyana kings, Pargiter, *loc. cit.*, pp. 33–35, 71.

dynasty; but a disastrous period for most of them, by reason of the decay of fire-sacrifices. It would be centuries before Buddhism in its turn became uneconomic by growth of rich monasteries, and useless to the masses by its isolation. In that interval, the Brāhmaṇa had learned to adjust himself to reality without facing it. New deities had been found, and many local deities synthesized by the *avatāra* theory or as synonyms for one of the major gods. The power of the synthetic method is shown by Buddha himself being counted as the ninth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. On the other hand, Buddhist monasteries were already becoming huge uneconomic foundations. The increasing number of Brāhmaṇa converts led by the second century to a change from the peoples' languages to Sanskrit for Buddhist writings; the writings themselves deal with abstract philosophical speculations which show that the monk had developed from the peripatetic almsman visualized by Buddha as a teacher of society into a parasite whose existence was bound up with that of the exploiting classes. Control of ritual always vested in the Brāhmaṇas, the Buddhist never having disputed it nor the cults of deities[1] (of whom the Buddha is *not* one though vedic gods are made to do him honour in Buddhist legends); caste, after all, we have seen to correspond to social classes, when viewed as a whole. New tribes could be enrolled by writing new scriptures, rewriting old ones, or treating them as new castes, explained at first as generated by various mixtures of the older four. On the other hand, what resistance there was to invaders after the ruin of the Śuṅga empire, particularly in the 1st century B.C. seems to have been supported by fire-sacrifices if not inspired by the Brāhmaṇas in the name of religion, while there is no possibility, or at least no records of Buddhist monks having done so. The Brāhmaṇa had personal property and a family. He had the ritual for success in battle. He also had some experience of, or at least contact with, administrative problems, as we see from the *Arthaśāstra* which is Brāhmaṇic with a tradition of preceding Brāhmaṇic works on statecraft; in fact, the commonest Sanskrit word for minister, *mantrin*, means the possessor of a magic formula, which implies a Brāhmaṇa. The Buddhist monastic order excluded by its very structure all such activities. We have a letter of the Buddhist monk Mātṛceṭa to a king asking him to spare animal life (F. W. Thomas, *Indian Antiquary*, XXXII, 1903, pp. 347–349; 1904, p. 21; 1905, p. 145), but there is no question of organizing any resistance. The synthetic method was of great use in absorbing all victorious foreigners except those who, like the Mohammedans, had a strong proselyting religion of their own and could recruit low castes. In fact, many foreigners in later times seem to have used conversion to Jainism or Buddhism as an intermediate (though not indispensable) step towards enrolment a generation or two later as Brāhmaṇas or Kṣatriyas, their social position permitting.[2] The Brāhmaṇa could ignore productive imports or utilize them: paper (like gunpowder) came from China with the Mohammedans, and was used by the Brāhmaṇas for writing, though manufactured usually by Muslims in India. The Mohammedans brought other Chinese influences which do not seem to have spread, as for example porcelain tiles, the unquestionably Sinoidal minarets of the Bolī Gumbaz at Bijāpur, and possibly, some dome forms. But the rose that they introduced into the country was and is used even by the most orthodox Brāhmaṇa in worship (syphilis and tea belong to the European period).

The main Brāhmaṇical readjustment was the doctrine of non-killing engrafted upon the older ritual. The dying out of fire-sacrifice, loss of the heady Soma drink and of beef-eating, did not matter as long as the basic economic unit of the country

[1] The seventh century emperor Harṣa was Buddhist enough to pardon one who attempted to assassinate him, and his drama *Nāgānanda* is Buddhistic; but he and members of his family also followed the cult of the goddess Gaurī.

[2] D. R. Bhandarkar, *Indian Antiquary*, XL, 1911, 7–37. The passing-over even to a higher caste is sanctioned by Manusmṛti 10.64-65.

was the village, and means of production agrarian with primitive methods of peasant cultivation, without private or at least without capitalistic ownership in land. Ritual is preserved hereafter with such changes as were thrust upon it by force of circumstances, but for every innovation we find a claim of antiquity, usually fictitious. Even the *Allopaniṣad* and the *Āṅglapurāṇa* become possible. The reason is that no matter what the form of the ritual, its content and social function is now of a fundamentally different nature. Primitive magic tried to control nature and increase production while later observances and tabus are primarily for the maintenance of the *status quo* in favour of a definite class. They do their best to stifle criticism, to absorb any destructive excess of social energy. When this stage is reached, we have the static ideal of caste. History loses its meaning.